



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. Purpose of and Need for Action

1. Project Title: Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex (GFSSC)

2. Type of Proposed Action:

- a) Install four traps in existing skeet fields.
- b) Improvements to Pistol Range.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action: The Shooting Sports Complex is three miles north of Great Falls, Montana. Range complex is approximately 942.37 acres off of Ryan Dam Road. Formerly the Beckman property with Black Horse Butte on north edge of the property, but known locally as Radio Tower Hill from the microwave relay towers on top. Of the 942.37 acres, 582.37 are owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and the remaining 360 acres is owned by GFSSC.

FWP: Township 21 North, Range 4 East, M.P.M.
Section 15: NW $\frac{1}{4}$; Section 16: NE $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$

GFSSC: Township 21 North, Range 4 East, M.P.M.
Section 15: NE $\frac{1}{4}$; Section 16: SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) MCA87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing applications for funding assistance under the program.

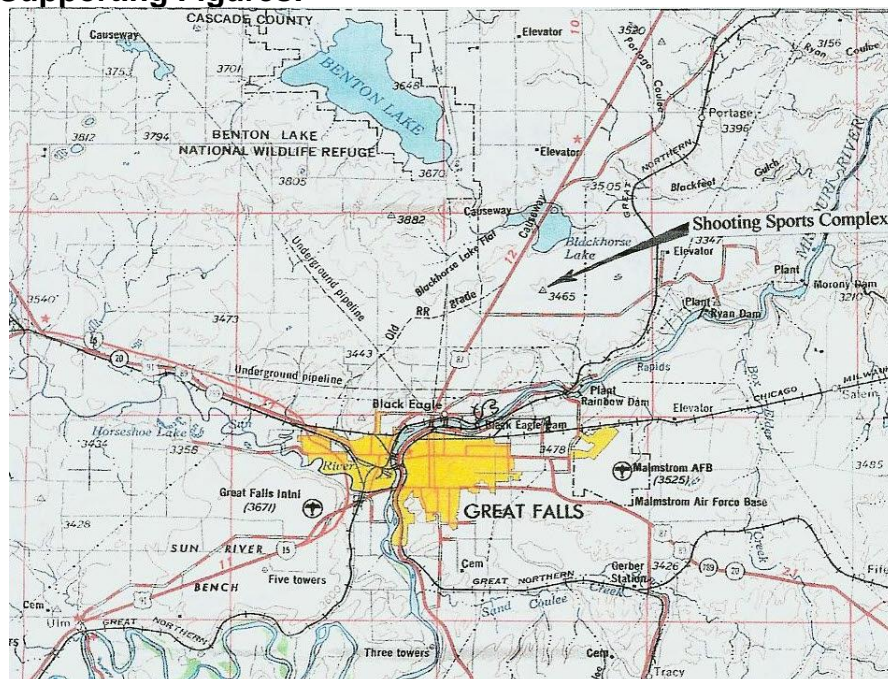
To be eligible for grant assistance, a private shooting club or a private organization:

- (a)(i) shall accept in its membership any person who holds or is eligible to hold a Montana hunting license and who pays club or organization membership fees;*
- (ii) may not limit the number of members;*
- (iii) may charge a membership fee not greater than the per-member share of the club's or organization's reasonable cost of provision of services, including establishment, improvement, and maintenance of shooting facilities and other membership services; and*
- (iv) shall offer members occasional guest privileges at no cost to the member or invited guest and shall make a reasonable effort to hold a public sight-in day each September, when the general public may use the shooting range for a day-use fee or at no cost; or*
- (b) shall admit the general public for a reasonable day-use fee.*

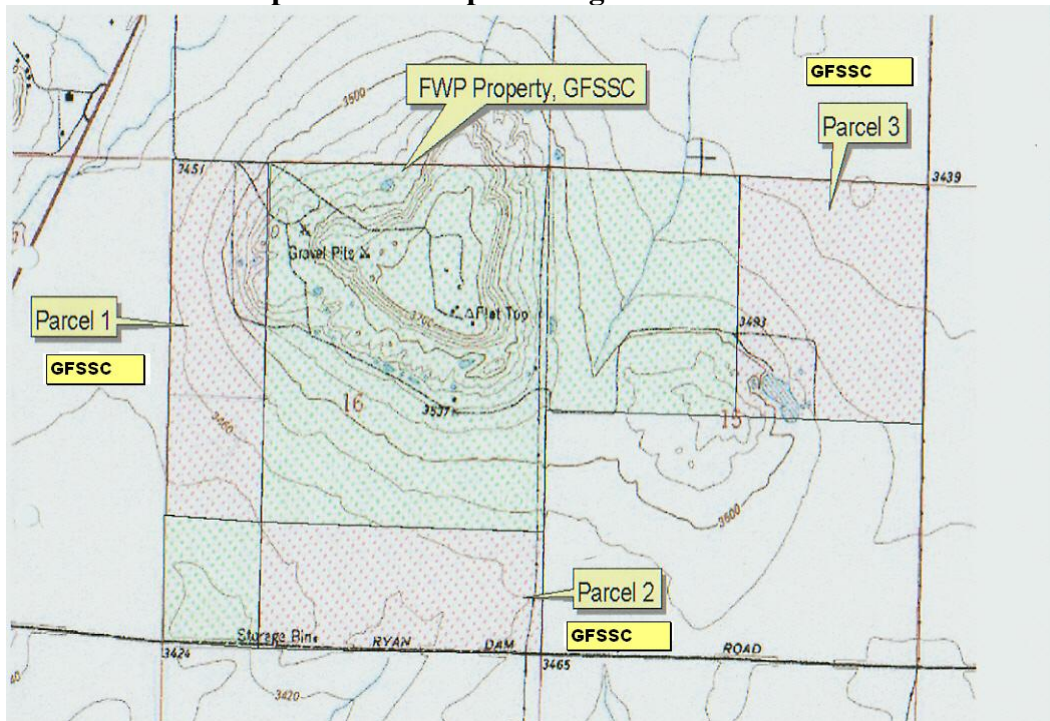
5. Need for the Action(s): The Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex has an ongoing program to meet the needs of the shooting public in the Great Falls area. The original GFSSC Board developed a long-term plan to continue to develop the complex to meet the need and demands of their ever growing shooting community. To meet the increased demands of the overall community GFSSC has continued with their development plan of increased safety, operational control and recreational opportunities by providing additional or improved trap/skeet facilities and pistol range improvements.

6. Objectives for the Action(s): Provide improved trap/skeet and pistol range operations to meet the demands of the growing shooting community in the Great Falls area.

7. Maps and Supporting Figures:



Map 1 – Area Map showing GFSSC location.



Map 2 – Black Horse Butte showing land ownership between FWP & GFSSC. Green areas are FWP property and red are GFSSC properties.

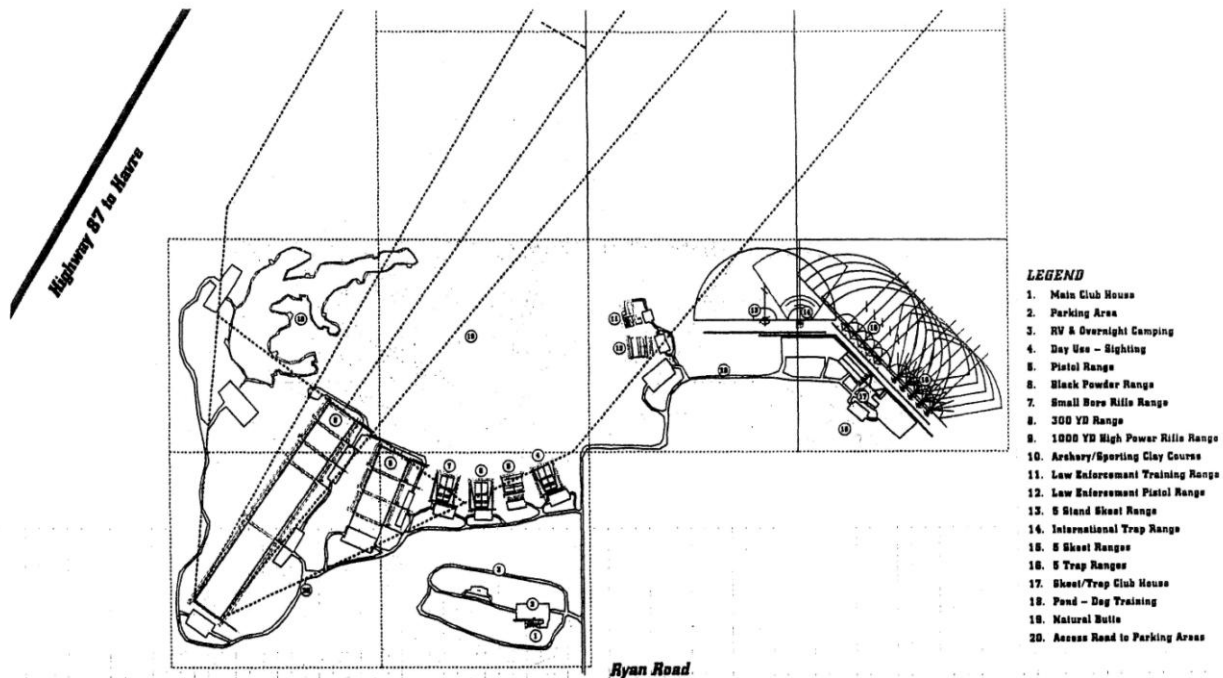


Figure 1 – Original Site Plan for GFSSC (CTA Architects Engineers). Range layout maybe slightly different from this original site plan.

8. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:

The proposed improvements will be safely within a smaller area on the skeet and pistol ranges.

9. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):

The surrounding area and most of range is or was formerly agricultural primarily used for dry land farming. Currently 278.07 acres of the GFSSC properties are characterized as too saline or too steep to farm. The GFSSC is surrounded by one farm operation. There are no delineated wetlands, nor natural water sources within the area proposed for development, but the range complex did contain 3 older man-made reservoirs and other “wet” areas that are ephemeral and may occasionally contain water from snow melt.

10. Description of Project:

- a) Purchase four Laporte trap machines and install concrete trap houses; and concrete firing points, five rows from 16 yards to 27 yards (for location, see Figure 1, #16).
- b) Purchase and install compressor and pneumatic actuators to rotate targets simultaneously to accommodate Bulls eye Pistol matches on the pistol range, a storage area at the rear of the pistol range firing line cover, to construct a center range officer booth and public announcement system for pistol range safety, and sidewalks to accommodate wheelchairs to the pistol range firing line. (for location, see Figure 1, #5).

In Accordance With (IAW) contracts agreements with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, all projects are to be completed by June 30, 2010.

11. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

(a) Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>
NONE	

Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$34,175

12. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups:

Sportsmen Clubs: Safari Club, National Rifle Association, Montana Wildlife Federation, Mule Deer Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Walleye’s Unlimited.

Shooting Sports: Missouri River Shooters, Sun River Skeet Club, Russell Country Sportsmen, Ed McGiveran Pistol Club.

Government/Corporate Sponsors: PPL Montana, Cascade County, City of Great Falls, Three Rivers Communication

Law Enforcement: Great Falls City Police, Montana Highway Patrol, US Border Patrol, Montana CIB, Montana Probation & Parole, Malmstrom AFB Security Force, Montana Law Enforcement Academy,

Cascade County Sheriff, FWP Law Enforcement, US Marshall Service, FBI, US Customs, US Fish & Wildlife Service, BIA Youth Education: 4H Shooting Program, Olympic Shooting Program, FWP Hunter Safety Program.

Fish Wildlife & Parks as owner of the majority of the property to be leased to a Board of Directors of the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex, Inc.

13. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:

Extensive public involvement was not deemed necessary due to the previous completed EAs addressing future range plans. These previous EAs should be tiered for completion of this EA. Proposed range improvements and safety enhancements had been discussed within the membership of the club and with the associated project vendors and contractors. Board of Director's Meetings, are open to the GFSSC membership and the public. These meeting are the first Tuesday of every month, with a general membership meeting on the second Tuesday of January. This project and other proposals can be accessed on the GFSSC website where meeting minutes, newsletters, range schedules and other items of interest are posted for public viewing.

14. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

15. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

John Sprague, 3128 Wells Fargo Dr., Great Falls, MT 59404, 868-6635
grizzsprague@yahoo.com

16. Other Pertinent Information: Previous EAs completed in 2001 (Acquisition of a Community Shooting Range), 2005 (Shooting Range Complex Plan and Construction), 2007 and 2009 (Continuation of Shooting Range Complex Plan) considered the building and improvements for all of the ranges proposed here. Completion of all the initial construction on those ranges is done and the new actions are the planned follow-on improvements or next phase. Consequently the 2005, 2007 and 2009 environmental assessment for the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex is applicable here, and appropriate portions should be tiered for this EA. Although the 2005, 2007 and 2009 EAs addressed the specific actions proposed then, a broader analysis of the entire range complex's environment was conducted, with future improvements being addressed. Those broad environmental assessments should be tiered for use in the continuation of this project. A cultural resources inventory on 582.37 acres of the complex was conducted in November 2005. That inventory discovered five cultural sites and three isolated finds. This information was then published in February 2007. Even though this EA may be tiered with the completed 2001, 2005, 2007 and 2009 EAs, to insure proper analysis the current EA checklist is used for these next phases of the development.

Shooting range applications require the participant's governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range funding assistance. Resolution Date: April 27, 2010.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmental sensitive areas)

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		#2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		#4
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		#5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		#7
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		#8
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		#9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments

2. & 5. There are no delineated wetlands and no natural water sources within the area proposed for development. There are 24 old reservoirs or waterholes in the area which were identified during the February 2007 Cultural Resources Inventory. During the surveys of August 2005 there was no water found in any of these sites and only wet mud and a small puddle in the largest “pond” east of the bentonite hill. The three “wetter” reservoirs are located in the area of the bentonite hill, and on the north side of Black Horse Butte and southeast side of Black Horse Butte along the access road. Two of these are on FWP property and the largest pond is on GFSSC property. These three man-made reservoirs have some water for most of the wet years and all three had water during this July 2007 survey. The larger pond area, northeast of the bentonite hill, is designated as the future dog training area. There are no plans to eliminate, nor materially alter any of these ponds in the future. The other “so-called” water holes identified during the cultural inventory are ephemeral and only occasionally collect rain or snowmelt, and none of these are permanent surface water sources. There was no water found in any of these areas during the

surveys of August 2005, nor again in July 2007. The majority of these “wetter” sites are on the GFSSC property and outside of the future proposals for development on the range. The primary aquifer is approximately 500 feet beneath the surface with minimal risk of pollution.

4. The elimination of vegetation for the implementation of the proposed action would not change the overall abundance and diversity of plant species within the area. The proposed projects occupy a very small portion of the individual properties and native vegetation is minimally present anywhere on the property. Therefore it is determined to have an insignificant impact on native vegetation in the area.

7. The project would cause limited displacement of soils but these improvements and construction will not substantially effect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures are in effect and disturbed areas are to be reseeded. Reseeding will be with native short-grass prairie & CRP species with some alfalfa added for soil improvement.

8. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during the proposed improvements within this project area. However the construction time is short and human effects will be limited due to the sparse population in the surrounding area.

9. This project uses no federal funds, therefore, the Federal 106 Regulations does not apply, but the State Antiques Act does apply, when projects are on state owned properties. Previous archeological surveys on the shooting complex did not find any historical or archeological sites in current proposed project areas.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		#4
5. Human health				X		#5
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		#7
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		#9
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments

4. The site is adjacent to surrounding agricultural land. Agricultural leases are being pursued to continue dry land farming on portions of the property. Currently 278.07 acres of the property are characterized as too saline or too steep to farm.

5. Range site plans, construction and the ongoing operational and maintenance plans meet the standards of safety for the range participants and the public at large.

7. Range complex would provide year round controlled access and fulfils a need for a range to accommodate law enforcement training, hunter education, and public shooting. Individual public shooting opportunities are provided two days per month on the public range from April through September, and also additional public “site-in” opportunities before big game season. Additional range time may be provided for individual groups and organizations upon request. A schedule of range times and availability can be found on the GFSSC website at www.GFSSC.net.

9. This is a rural area with a low population density. The GFSSC site is completely surrounded by one farm operation. The nearest other neighbor is over 1/3 mile on the NW corner on opposite side of the butte.

Part III. Environmental Consequences

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? This proposed action has no impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Identification of the Preferred Alternatives:

The proposed alternative A, alternative B and the no action alternative were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** provides partial funding to GFSSC for the projects described in Part I paragraph 10 (Description of Project) to add trap to the skeet range and improve the pistol range.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Sports Grant money would be denied then the area might remain an active shooting complex without additional trap opportunities on the skeet range and without improvements to the pistol range.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented: Two alternatives have been considered, **A** (Proposed Alternative) and **B** (No Action Alternative). There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent.

Neither the proposed alternative (**A**) nor the no action alternative (**B**) would have any significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

- There are beneficial consequences to Acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative (A)** increasing shooting sports opportunities in the Great Falls area by offering trap shooting on the skeet ranges and by improving the pistol range with rotating targets, storage area, and handicapped accessibility.
- The **No Action Alternative (B)** would be to not provide funding to GFSSC for the purpose of developing trap on the skeet range, nor improvements to the pistol range with rotating targets, storage area, and handicapped access, but to continue on with shooting activities on the skeet and pistol ranges without proposed improvements. Land use would remain the same.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

NONE

List and explain proposed mitigative measures (stipulations):

NONE

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

John Sprague, 3128 Wells Fargo Dr., Great Falls, MT 59404
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PART IV NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. None of the project reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being proposed are on properties owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The low impact activities proposed, and the increased recreational opportunity, all indicate that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative (A). The Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex's proposed alternative, to provide a safe regulated shooting opportunity is supported by its members and the public. Therefore, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the proposed alternative (A) for the expansion proposals outlined in Part I paragraphs 2 & 10.

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Ecological Assessments
Helena, MT 59602

Date Completed: June 11, 2010
FWP Approved: August 30, 2010

PART V. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

None required.

Describe public involvement, if any:

Announcement for EA comment will be published in the Great Falls Tribune and on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website to allow an opportunity for public review. Additionally the EA will be available for review on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website. Public comments will be accepted through 5:00 PM on September 17, 2010.